

Statement of the Honorable Mazie Hirono
In the House of Representatives
In Support of H. Con. Res. 63

I rise to speak in support of this resolution. The Iraq war has lasted longer than U.S. involvement in World War II, and cost the nation hundreds of billions of dollars. We lost over 3,000 of our finest men and women, thousands more have been maimed, and too many lives have been shattered.

As Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Lantos said, this resolution “will establish the first marker”, the first step toward ending “this nightmare.”

The war in Iraq is the moral issue of the day and like all great moral issues there are heart-felt disagreements on both sides of the aisle. But every second, minute and hour that passes, lives are being lost in Iraq and devastation continues with no end in sight.

We owe it to all the brave men and women who have already sacrificed so much--over 3,000 of them who made the ultimate sacrifice—to steer our country on a course that will bring our troops home safely, take care of them and their families when they return and end this war.

Despite four years and deadly losses, according to Foreign Policy magazine's recent survey of over 100 top national security experts, 86 percent say the world is more dangerous for the U.S. and, most troubling, 87 percent believe that the war in Iraq has had a negative impact on the war on terror. Other surveys have reached the same conclusion.

Yet, the President now wants another \$235 billion for Iraq and Afghanistan to add to the \$427 billion for the war already approved.

In this debate, we should listen in particular to the words of Americans who actually served in the war. I am honored to serve in this Congress with new members Joe Sestak of Pennsylvania, Tim Walz of Minnesota and Patrick Murphy also of Pennsylvania, all veterans of the Iraq War. Their eloquent and strong voices of first-hand experience add immeasurably to this debate.

There are also people like Capt. Lisa Blackman, a clinical psychologist, who cared for soldiers in Qatar. As we become increasingly aware of the thousands of soldiers who emerged from firefights or attacks physically unscathed but with substantial emotional damage, Capt. Blackman's experience in regularly tending

to these soldiers provide further troubling insights about this devastating war.

In a message chronicled in the book Operation Homecoming, Dr. Blackman wrote of how her patients responded to questions she asked them about their symptoms.

She didn't get the expected reactions. They were unexpressive. But when she asked them, "Have you ever been in combat?", they became unglued and burst into tears.

As she described it: "[W]hen I say burst, I mean splatter—tears running, snot flowing, and I literally had to mop my floor after one two-hour session. In other words, I mean sobbing for minutes on end, unable to speak, flat out grief."

She observed: "No one ever feels like they are doing enough. If you are in a safe location, you feel guilty that your friends are getting shot at and you aren't. If you are getting shot at, you feel guilty if your buddy gets hit and you don't. If you get shot at but don't die, you feel guilty that you lived, and more guilty if you get to go home and your friends have to stay behind. I have not seen one person out here who didn't [check off] "increased guilt" on our intake form."

Indeed, every soldier who saw combat or the results of combat has likely suffered hidden but disturbing psychological harm to some extent.

In spite of this, the Veterans' Administration has been deprived of the critical funds necessary for the rehabilitation of these brave troops.

The President, who continues to send more and more troops into the war, on one hand, has sought to reduce spending for medical services for these same troops, on the other. His budget reduces spending for VA over the next three years.

Our troops are not the only ones suffering from the policies of this administration. All Americans--who now oppose the war 2 to 1--are impacted by the massive cuts in or complete elimination of important social, health, education and environmental programs.

The cost of this war keeps going up, adding to our national debt. The interest on our debt alone is more than we devote to the education of our children, care of our veterans and for the administration of justice, combined.

This body must go on record in unified and solid opposition to the escalation of the war and in complete support of our soldiers and veterans. We must be resolute in our efforts to bring an end to this quagmire.

As Speaker Pelosi said, "Friday's vote will signal whether the House has heard the American people. No more blank checks for President Bush on Iraq. "